

in Syria. According to the State Department's International Religious Freedom Report for 2012, "The regime continued to frame opposition actions as targeting the Christian population. At the same time, it increased its own targeting of Christian and Alawi anti-regime activists in order to eliminate minority-voices that might counter its narrative of 'Sunni-Sponsored violence'."

Religious minorities seem to fear the opposition forces. Some prominent opposition groups (such as the Muslim Brotherhood) have a religious basis which has been seen as threatening to Syria's Alawite and Christian minorities.

Smaller opposition factions, such as the al-Qaeda-affiliated jihadist al-Nusra Front, take explicitly sectarian positions. There are reports of incidents in which rebel forces engaged in sectarian violence, such as burning Shi'ite mosques.

Christians are perceived by many in the opposition to be Assad loyalists, possibly due to Assad's aggressive recruitment of Christians into the regime militias at the start of the civil war. Other reports indicate that the Christians attempted to remain neutral either out of pacifism or concern about their rights under opposition forces.

Christian neutrality was perceived by some opposition groups as loyalty to the regime. In December 2012, a rebel force believed to be associated with the Muslim Brotherhood released a Youtube video entitled, "Warning mainly Christian cities in the province of Hama", and promising attacks if they continue to support and house the pro-Assad forces.

Christian leaders have been targeted, such as the April 2013 kidnapping of Mor Gregorius Yohanna Ibrahim of the Syriac Orthodox Church and Bishop Boulos Yazigi of the Greek Orthodox Church—both men still have not been returned.

The Druze community reports being targeted as well. In March 2013, a Druze leader reported to Christian Solidarity International, "Our people get stopped at checkpoints and are asked which sect they belong to. Once the militias hear that they are from Swaida [a province where 90% of the population is Druze], our men disappear."

The al-Nusra Front, a U.S. designated foreign terrorist organization, has been blamed for much of the sectarian rhetoric and violence, but dozens of the opposition groups ascribe to Islamist or Salafist-jihadist ideologies and mingle with the Free Syrian Army—which the U.S. may now be supporting.

Over the last three years, the United States has committed to providing \$250 million to various opposition groups in Syria—at least \$117 million of which has already been funded, largely to the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces. With the chemical weapon red line crossed, the Administration has also agreed to provide ammunition and small arms.

It is not clear whether any of this new lethal assistance will go to the Free Syrian Army and its worrisome opposition groups.

The Administration has also committed to send an additional \$300 million in humanitarian aid to "vulnerable groups" in and surrounding Syria. It is not clear whether distribution of this aid will be informed by the plight of religious minorities.

I am very concerned that the Administration may not be taking seriously the targeting of re-

ligious minorities. Too often, we have heard from this Administration that they have bigger issues to deal with than the vulnerability of religious minorities.

In the last two appropriations cycles, we have directed the Administration to condition aid to Egypt (\$1.3 billion dollars) on certification that Egypt is acting to protect the religious freedom of its minorities. The Administration (both Secretaries Clinton and Kerry) refused to do so. Perhaps not surprisingly, the government of Egypt continues to allow attacks on Coptic Christians with impunity.

Money talks. The United States should be using assistance to ensure recipient countries and entities have a plan that is implemented to protect vulnerable religious minorities. This is all the more critical in situations like Syria, where we are providing lethal aid in what has become sectarian tinderbox.

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RECOGNIZING DR. MITCHELL T. MUNSON

**HON. MIKE COFFMAN**

OF COLORADO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Wednesday, June 26, 2013*

Mr. COFFMAN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize a constituent of mine, Dr. Mitchell T. Munson, of Highlands Ranch, Colorado. Dr. Munson will soon be elected president of the American Optometric Association (AOA) during their 116th annual meeting, where he will be installed as the association's 91st president on Saturday, June 29, 2013, in San Diego, California.

Dr. Munson is a graduate of the Southern California College of Optometry and has a private practice in Highlands Ranch, Colorado. He has been a leader in his profession at the local, state, and national levels. The Colorado Optometric Association (COA) named him Young Optometrist of the Year in 1993 and he became president of the COA in 1995. Dr. Munson is a past president of the Southwest Council of Optometry and a Fellow in the American Academy of Optometry.

Dr. Munson has built a renowned record of service and leadership in his profession and I am confident that he will have a very successful term as president of the AOA. The sixth District of Colorado is proud to have Dr. Munson as a constituent and I join his family, friends, and colleagues in congratulating him on this achievement and wishing him the very best of luck.

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ETHIOPIA AFTER MELES: THE FUTURE OF DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

**HON. CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH**

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Wednesday, June 26, 2013*

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, last week, the Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations, which I chair, held a hearing that examined the human rights and governance situation in Ethiopia, and the status of U.S. relations with Ethiopia. Given Ethiopia's important cooperation in opposing Is-

lamic militants in Somalia, as well as its cooperation in other counter-terrorism and peacekeeping efforts, the administration has been reluctant to seriously hold the Ethiopian government to account for persistent, egregious human rights violations, including the inability of the opposition political parties to function, restrictions on civil society organizations and journalists that prevent them from operating freely and forced removals of citizens from their lands.

According to the USAID's Assistant Administrator for Africa Earl Gast, "USAID believes that open channels of communication with the Ethiopian government create opportunities to influence democracy, rights, and governance issues." However, Amnesty International testified last week that "[s]ince 2005 the human rights situation in the country has deteriorated still further, with significantly increased restrictions placed on freedom of expression, association and other rights. Sadly the Ethiopian authorities have not acted in a vacuum during this period. The United States and others in the international community have failed to raise concerns over the government's systematic violation of human rights and flouting of its international obligations. The failure to speak out and press for change has emboldened the government and also allowed Ethiopia to set a dangerous example for other governments in the region to emulate. It is critical that the United States and other members of the international community press the Ethiopian authorities to address human rights concerns and repeal and reform key legislation and policies."

Amnesty International also noted in its testimony today that "[f]or Ethiopians held in detention, conditions continue to be extremely harsh. Torture is regularly reported to take place during interrogation in the initial stages of detention, often before the detainees have access to their families or to legal representatives. Prisoners have been slapped, suspended from the walls and ceiling by their wrists, beaten with various objects, denied sleep, electrocuted, and had weights suspended from their genitalia. Solitary confinement for extended periods is often reported. Within prison facilities, sanitation was often reported to be poor. Amnesty International has received reports of medical resources being withheld, and reports of deaths in custody. Food and water is often in short supply, and is supplemented by visiting family members where access is permitted."

Ethiopia is Africa's second most populous country, after Nigeria, and the United States considers its government to be an important development and regional security partner. Ethiopia plays a key leadership role in the region, hosts the African Union (AU) headquarters, and is a major troop contributor to U.N. peacekeeping operations.

According to the State Department, the three pillars of the bilateral relationship with Ethiopia are economic growth and development; democracy, governance, and human rights; and regional peace and security. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor Karen Hanrahan stated in an October 2012 speech that "advancing democracy and human rights is one of our highest priorities in our engagement with Ethiopia." Nevertheless, it has been difficult to get cooperation from the current and previous administrations in confronting the